



U. S. Department of Justice

News Release

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HEROIN/FENTANYL PIPELINE TO WILMINGTON DISRUPTED

WILMINGTON – United States Attorney Robert J. Higdon, Jr. announced the conclusion of OCDETF Operation “Tooth Fairy”. An Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) is a joint federal, state, and local cooperative approach to combatting drug trafficking and is the nation’s primary tool for disrupting and dismantling major drug trafficking organizations, targeting national and regional level drug trafficking organizations, and coordinating the necessary law enforcement entities and resources to disrupt or dismantle the targeted criminal organization and seize their assets.

The defendants’ convictions and sentencings were the culmination of a multi-year and multi-agency investigation into a heroin/fentanyl trafficking ring operating primarily around Wilmington, North Carolina and the surrounding counties.

On September 19, 2016, in a joint investigation between the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) Safe Streets Task Force (Gang Unit) and the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office Vice Division, law enforcement arranged an undercover purchase of heroin from **DEANDRE SWEET**. When **DEANDRE SWEET** arrived in a parking

lot in Wilmington to complete the sale, law enforcement stopped his rental car and found 500 bags of heroin. **DEANDRE SWEET** was then arrested.

In the same joint investigation, between June and October 2017, law enforcement conducted several undercover purchases of heroin from **KYERIC SWEET** and **DIQUELLE SWEET**. The investigation revealed that **ANDREW LIGE** was a source of supply for the Sweets. On October 12, 2017, law enforcement arrested **KYERIC SWEET** in possession of a quantity of heroin and more than \$2,500. On October 10, 2017, **DIQUELLE SWEET** was a passenger in a vehicle that attempted to flee from the Elizabethtown Police following a traffic checking station. Officers stopped the vehicle and found **SWEET** seated on a loaded Taurus 9mm handgun with a bullet in the chamber. The driver was prosecuted by the Bladen County District Attorney's Office for an additional firearm.

On July 26, 2016, **TEREK HARPER** was stopped in Sampson County for a traffic violation and found to be in possession of a large quantity of heroin. **HARPER** was travelling to Wilmington to distribute the heroin. **HARPER** is currently awaiting sentencing in North Carolina State Court on this charge.

On July 26, 2016, Duplin County Sheriff's Deputies and the North Carolina Highway Patrol attempted to stop a car driven **ANDREW JEROME LIGE**. **LIGE** led law enforcement on a lengthy chase through Duplin County – reaching speeds in excess of 115 miles per hour. During the chase, **KEVIN SIMPKINS**, the passenger in the car, threw out a bag containing more than 9,800 bags of heroin (more than 130 grams). A trooper was finally able to immobilize the car. During the investigation,

it was determined that **LIGE** had been making trips to New Jersey to acquire heroin for distribution in Eastern North Carolina.

On November 26, 2017, **LIGE** was the victim of a home invasion robbery. **LIGE** was shot and found in close proximity to a handgun. At the time of the robbery, **LIGE**, a convicted felon, was prohibited from possessing handgun.

On November 30, 2017, New Hanover County Sheriff's Detectives searched **SHAWQI GRAY's** residence and a trailer on the property. Law enforcement found the following items: more than 130 grams of a heroin/fentanyl mixture, more than 150 grams of a mixture of heroin and ketamine, 90 grams of heroin, 5 loaded handguns (2 of which were stolen) and more than \$47,000 in cash. The investigation uncovered that **GRAY** had been involved in the distribution of more than a kilogram and half of heroin and fentanyl from 2017 until the time of his arrest. At the time of his arrest in November 2017, **GRAY** was a fugitive from Pennsylvania. On August 4, 2016, the Easton Police Department in Pennsylvania had searched **GRAY's** Pennsylvania residence. **GRAY** was not present for the search, during which law enforcement found 20 grams of heroin, 68 grams of crack cocaine, and more than \$19,000 in cash.

On February 26, 2018, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Wilmington Police Department received information that **LIGE** was transporting a load of heroin to the Wilmington area. As a result, law enforcement stopped **LIGE's** BMW in which **TONY SIMS** was driving and **LIGE** was a passenger. In the car, law enforcement found 5,000 bags of heroin (approximately 100 grams).

On April 5, 2018, the United States Marshals Service Fugitive Task Force and the Wilmington Police Department arrested **TEREK HARPER** at a motel in Wilmington. **HARPER** was found in possession of more than 3,400 bags of heroin (approximately 68 grams of heroin) and more than 9,000 in cash.

The defendants include:

- **SHAWQI GRAY**, 37, of Wilmington, NC. **GRAY** was sentenced to **204 months'** imprisonment in February 2019. **GRAY** pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute and possess with the intent to distribute one hundred (100) grams or more of heroin and a quantity of fentanyl, possession with intent to distribute one hundred (100) grams and possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking offense.
- **ANDREW JEROME LIGE**, also known as "Shotgun," 40, of Wilmington, NC. **LIGE** was sentenced to **132 months'** imprisonment on January 9, 2019. **LIGE** pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute and possess with the intent to distribute one hundred (100) grams or more of heroin and possess with the intent to distribute one hundred (100) grams or more of heroin.
- **KEVIN SIMPKINS**, 50, of Wilmington, NC. **SIMPKINS** was sentenced to **132 months'** imprisonment. **SIMPKINS** pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute and possess with the intent to distribute one hundred (100) grams or more of heroin and possess with the intent to distribute one hundred (100) grams or more of heroin.
- **DEANDRE SWEET**, 27, of Wilmington, NC. **SWEET** was sentenced to **105 months'** imprisonment in October 2018. **SWEET** pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute a quantity of heroin and possess with intent to distribute a quantity of heroin.
- **DIQUELLE SWEET**, 22, of Wilmington NC, **SWEET** was sentenced to **105 months** imprisonment in September 2018. **SWEET** pled guilty to 5 counts of distribution of a quantity of heroin and possession of a firearm by a convicted felon.
- **KYERIC SWEET**, 25, of Wilmington, NC. **SWEET** was sentenced to **90 months'** imprisonment on October 2018. **SWEET** pled guilty to possession with intent to distribute a quantity of heroin.
- **TEREK HARPER**, also known as "Reek," 34, of New Jersey. **HARPER** pled guilty to conspiring to distribute and possess with the intent to distribute a 100 grams or more of heroin and possession with intent to distribute 100 grams or more of heroin. **HARPER** was sentenced to **87 months'** imprisonment on April 1, 2019. **HARPER** is awaiting sentencing in North Carolina State Court and faces a mandatory

minimum active sentence to be served following the expiration of his federal sentence.

- **TONY SIMS**, 52, of Wilmington, NC. **SIMS** was sentenced to **48 months'** imprisonment on January 25, 2019. SIMS pled guilty to conspiracy to distribute and possess with the intent to distribute a quantity of heroin and possession with the intent to distribute a quantity of heroin

The investigation of this case was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Safe Streets and Coastal Carolina Criminal Enterprise Task Forces; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; United States Marshals Service Fugitive Task Force; Wilmington Police Department (Gang Unit); Elizabethtown Police Department; Duplin County Sheriff's Office; New Hanover County Sheriff's Office; Sampson County Sheriff's Office; and, North Carolina Highway Patrol. Assistant United States Attorney Timothy Severo prosecuted these cases on behalf of the government.

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